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Formative evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative

Executive summary**

Summary

Over the past few decades, considerable effort has gone into making education accessible and to creating opportunities for all children and young people. Still, it is estimated that there is a "100-year gap" between education levels and outcomes in developing countries and those in developed countries.[a] Gaps in enrolment, completion and learning rates persist, mostly because there are too many children who come to school lacking the preparation they need to succeed, while a substantial number are left out of the education ecosystem altogether. The mission of the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) is to draw attention to the situation of these children, and to both challenge and support partner countries to accelerate programming on their behalf. OOSCI has, to some extent, been successful in this.

Launched in 2010, OOSCI is a partnership between UNICEF, the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Global Partnership for Education. The initiative is aimed at supporting Governments to develop and apply innovative approaches to better estimate the number of children excluded from educational opportunities, identify these children and develop solutions to bring them back to school.

The theory of change for OOSCI postulates that the provision of detailed data and evidence on why children are out of school, coupled with extensive advocacy efforts, will prompt Governments to implement the changes in their educational systems necessary to bring children into school and to achieve the stated goal of OOSCI: a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of children who are out of school.

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** The executive summary of the evaluation report is being circulated in all official languages. The full report is available in English from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website (see annex).

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The present evaluation of OOSCI was commissioned in 2017 and concluded in 2018. Evidence of the contribution of UNICEF and that of partners was derived through a qualitative design, including secondary data analysis; an online survey administered to all UNICEF country offices implementing OOSCI; and interviews and focus group discussions at the country and global levels. Evidence was also generated through the qualitative comparative analysis method: investigating the different contextual conditions in which OOSCI was implemented and the combinations of factors that would make the reduction of the number of out-of-school children more likely in one context and less likely in another.

The evaluation findings show that OOSCI has been instrumental in situating issues of out-of-school children at the centre of the development agenda at the national and international levels. Some level of advocacy on and commitment to these issues is shown around processes of setting priorities and formulating sector plans. However, this has not been matched by the allocation of adequate resources on a sustainable basis, and it is not always clear if all partners fully embrace the "rights-based" model of education underpinning OOSCI.

Recommendations include (a) updating the theory of change for OOSCI to reflect the key elements that will make inclusiveness of all groups of out-of-school children possible, while also focusing on identifying strategies and policies to promote participation at the preschool level; (b) expanding technical capabilities for effective implementation and comprehensive monitoring; (c) expanding the OOSCI partner base to give more voice to non-traditional partners at the local level, while maintaining a clear focus on the results they are expected to deliver; and (d) strengthening programmatic elements to yield, in a future evaluation, more-confident estimates of the OOSCI contribution towards the reduction of the number of out-of-school children.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section V.

[a] Robinson, Jenny Perlman and others, "Millions learning: scaling up quality education in developing countries", Brookings Institution (Washington, D.C., 2016). Available from www.brookings.edu/research/millions-learning-scaling-up-quality-education-in-developing-countries.

I. Background and purpose of the evaluation

1. The Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) is a partnership between UNICEF, the Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Global Partnership for Education.[1] It was launched in 2010 with the aim of supporting Governments to develop and apply innovative approaches to better estimate the number of children excluded from educational opportunities, to identify these children and to develop solutions to extend learning opportunities to them. Other OOSCI partners are the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, which both supported OOSCI work through another initiative, Understanding Children's Work.[2]

2. At its inception in 2010, OOSCI was being implemented in 25 partner countries; by the end of 2016, that number had risen to 87. The initiative is organized around three programme objectives, namely:

(a) To develop the capacity and robust processes for deriving profiles of out-of-school children and to analyse barriers that have led to these children's exclusion;

(b) To identify and implement effective policies and strategies to reduce the number of out-of-school children, and to integrate the necessary changes within education-sector plans to ensure their sustainability;

(c) To bring to the issue of out-of-school children greater international attention and enhanced advocacy that will translate into commitments (national and international) to ensure that all children have access to school.

3. In 2013, the Global Partnership for Education provided a grant to the initiative to bring greater awareness to the work being done globally on the issue of out-of-school children and to accelerate progress in achieving the objectives of OOSCI.

4. OOSCI uses an evidence-based approach to advocate for policies, strategies and budgeting practices aimed at addressing the problem of out-of-school children. In an OOSCI study, data are typically collected from diverse sources, e.g., education and health systems, regional and population surveys, which are used to estimate the number of children who are out of school and to create profiles that describe the different groups of out-of-school children.[3] Over time, a unified concept of out-of-school children was articulated (the five dimensions of exclusion) to capture some of the nuances of the problem and to highlight the need for different strategies to address different categories of out-of-school children.

5. The main outputs of the initiative are regional and national OOSCI studies aimed at developing the capacities of national partners to undertake supplemental evidence-generation activities to identify the key issues and barriers that impede progress in access to and the completion of basic education. Evidence from OOSCI studies helps to raise awareness of the negative consequences of education exclusion

[1] The Global Partnership for Education formally joined the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) in 2013.

[2] Anchored by the International Labour Organization, UNICEF and the World Bank, the Understanding Children's Work initiative brings together leading academics, policymakers, practitioners and donors to conduct research and develop policies and solutions in the area of child labour and youth employment.

[3] Three terms are used to further describe the school status of children. "Visible children" refers to children appearing in Ministry of Education's databases. This usually does not include out-of-school children). "Semi-visible children" refers to those appearing in other databases (e.g., Ministry of Health) and who could be identified if the databases were linked. "Invisible children" refers to children who do not appear in any database, such as children working and/or living on the street or those from nomadic communities.

and underpins advocacy work with decision makers. It also provides the basis for recommending changes in government policies or strategies to reduce or eliminate barriers and to enable more children to access and complete at least the basic education cycle. It is assumed that the recommendations of OOSCI studies accurately reflect and respond to the barriers and present solutions that are politically, financially and technically feasible to implement.

6. A formative evaluation of OOSCI was commissioned in 2017 and completed in 2018. The purpose of the evaluation was to test the validity of the programme theory of change and its assumptions, to provide a formative assessment of progress towards the achievement of the overall goal of achieving a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of out-of-school children and to strengthen the programme logic. Three objectives defined in the evaluation terms of reference were as follows:

(a) To examine the efficacy of strategies supported by UNICEF towards realizing the goal of universal participation in basic education[4] and to determine whether pathways to reaching the intended goal were articulated clearly and were aligned with those of key partners;

(b) To determine the extent to which OOSCI studies generated credible evidence on out-of-school children, influenced key policy changes and facilitated the selection of effective strategies and interventions for various programming contexts, including countries undertaking humanitarian programming;

(c) To assess the UNICEF contribution to building individual and institutional capacities to address barriers to entering and staying in school, assess the adequacy of those contributions and evaluate efforts to build the capacities of key partners.

7. The evaluation covers the entire period of OOSCI implementation, from its inception in 2010 through the 2016 reporting period.

8. Organized around OOSCI programme outcomes descriptive and normative evaluation questions are presented in annex 1. The evaluation addresses the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability as promulgated by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC). It also addresses two additional criteria: coherence, to enable the assessment of the formative aspects of OOSCI and the evolving nature of some concepts and tools, and utility.

A. Scope

9. The evaluation covered all OOSCI partner countries whose studies were completed and/or adopted by their respective Governments by the end of 2016, estimated at 40 out of 87 countries. Countries were spread throughout all UNICEF regions. Partner countries were at different stages of OOSCI implementation (conducting studies, policy-level work, etc.). The evaluation also covered the inputs and activities of the OOSCI core partners, that is, the respective Governments, UNICEF, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Partnership for Education.

B. Evaluation use

10. The aim of the evaluation was to facilitate reflection and learning among education managers responsible for programming around out-of-school children in all partner countries and participating agencies. Also, implementation strategies to

[4] Basic education: primary and lower secondary education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 1-2, i.e., ISCED-Programmes).

improve programme coherence are anticipated. Policy makers and government counterparts are expected to use evidence from the evaluation to deepen their understanding of the issues faced by out-of-school children at all levels of their education systems as well as to mobilize stakeholders in other sectors.

II. Evaluation approach

11. A theory-based design was employed for the evaluation. The theory of change for OOSCI postulates that the provision of detailed data and evidence on why children are out of school, coupled with extensive advocacy efforts, will prompt Governments to implement the changes in their education systems necessary to bring children into school and to achieve the stated goal of OOSCI: a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of out-of-school children.

12. Evidence of the contributions of UNICEF and partners was derived through a qualitative design. Sources included (a) a desk-based review of secondary data analysis; (b) an online survey administered to education programme officers in all UNICEF country offices implementing OOSCI; (c) interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of respondents in UNICEF headquarters in New York as well as regional education advisers and/or OOSCI focal points in all seven UNICEF regional offices; and (d) interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders at the country level during the course of the field visits.[5]

13. Evidence was also generated through a qualitative comparative analysis.[6] This analysis was used to investigate the different contextual conditions under which OOSCI was implemented and combinations of factors that would make a reduction in the number of out-of-school children more likely in one context and less likely in another. Finally, survey data were subjected to descriptive analyses (e.g., mean values, standard deviations). These analyses were mainly used for triangulation with an additional data source and to substantiate the qualitative findings with a larger empirical base.

III. Selected findings, conclusions and evaluative assessment

14. Approaches to bring as many children and young people as possible into school have taken many forms, including grassroots lobbying for the importance of schooling, political declarations for universal access to education, initiatives to abolish school fees and the introduction of pro-poor education financing frameworks in many countries. Despite these efforts, too many children still await the opportunity to access and participate in schooling.

A. Progress towards universal basic education

15. Universal basic education provides a good starting point and a possible signal of political commitment to solving the problem of out-of-school children. Therefore, the evaluation investigated whether universal access to basic education was a documented goal in partner countries, with the following findings:

(a) Declarations of universal basic education, express or implied, were found in government documents for the majority of OOSCI partner countries (80 per cent),

[5] Field visits were conducted to selected OOSCI partner countries (Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Romania, Nepal, the Sudan and Zimbabwe and the UNICEF regional office in Nepal). The purpose of the field visits was to validate preliminary judgements and findings from the other data sources.

[6] For a more detailed description of the qualitative comparative analysis approach, see Charles C. Ragin, *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008).

signaling a strong intent to eliminate the problem of children being out of school. Also, OOSCI was credited with having brought both a positive attitudinal change to government partners on the subject of out-of-school children and new energy and a new push for prioritizing programmes around issues facing out-of-school children in UNICEF country offices;

(b) With nearly 70 per cent of the countries having executed or completed an OOSCI study, the Middle East and North Africa region maintained an intense focus on OOSCI and issues relating to out-of-school children. These efforts were beginning to show dividends, in both terms of targeting different groups of out-of-school children and in the variety of solutions for out-of-school children;

(c) These successes notwithstanding, one of the key messages of the evaluation is that while countries generally demonstrated a commitment to be inclusive, many OOSCI countries often conflated "inclusive education" with special education programmes. Because of this lack of conceptual clarity, interventions failed to address the exclusion of specific groups of out-of-school children;

(d) The links between the stated goals and objectives and the proposed and/or implemented strategies for universal basic education were often inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory. Further, subnational authorities often lacked the data and/or evidence required to make a strong push for investing in education and/or to devote the necessary time and resources to inclusion strategies.

16. Cumulatively, these findings point to the need to revisit what it means for access to and the provision of basic education to be truly universal and to update the conception of universal basic education. Increasingly, universal basic education is understood in the development community to mean "[providing] the greatest support to individuals who have the greatest need, while maintaining an element of universality that reflects the shared investment citizens make in education as taxpayers." [7] Conclusion 1 challenges OOSCI to address the problem of out-of-school children from similar conceptual underpinnings.

Conclusion 1

17. Universal basic education is still a unifying goal and message for galvanizing the education sector to maintain high enrolments and completion rates. Beyond these measures of participation and efficiency, universal basic education is increasingly being reconceptualized to include equity and inclusiveness, meaning that education resources should also be allocated to achieve progressive universalism, i.e., to combine a commitment to providing education for every child with more resources devoted to children who need the most help. [8] Adopting a formal definition of universal basic education to reflect this thinking would strengthen both the linkages between the objectives of OOSCI, UNICEF advocacy and resource mobilization efforts and other work around out-of-school children and the overarching goal of improving education outcomes for all children.

[7] Ian Diamond, "Review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales", (Cardiff, Welsh Government, 2016). Available from http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160927-he-review-final-report-en.pdf.

[8] International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, "The Learning generation: investing in education for a changing world" (undated).

B. Evidence generation and the utility of Out-of-School Children Initiative studies

18. The OOSCI Operational Manual articulates five dimensions of exclusion. The first three dimensions provide descriptions of children who are old enough to go to school, but are not enrolled or attending, while dimensions 4 and 5 describe children at risk of dropping out of school:

(a) Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary age who are not in pre-primary or primary school;

(b) Dimension 2: Children of primary school age (i) who are not in primary school; (ii) who attended but dropped out; and/or (iii) who will never enter or will enter late;

(c) Dimension 3: Children of lower-secondary school age (i) who are not in primary or secondary school; (ii) who attended but dropped out; and/or (iii) who will never enter or will enter late;

(d) Dimension 4: Children in primary school who are at risk of dropping out;

(e) Dimension 5: Children in lower-secondary school who are at risk of dropping out.

19. As a prerequisite, partner countries were supposed to ascertain, through their studies, whether the dimensions of exclusion described above fit the profiles of out-of-school children in their contexts, and to develop more-comprehensive profiles where necessary. Studies were also expected to identify barriers that kept children from accessing formal education and to propose strategies to address barriers that, if mitigated or eliminated, would result in a reduction in the number of out-of-school children. The evaluation found the following:

(a) OOSCI studies executed in partner countries were effective in generating profiles of out-of-school children and identifying barriers that prevent children from enrolling in school, cause them to drop out and/or prevent them from re-entering school appropriately. The table presented in annex 1 shows a range of barriers that impede children. Children's economic background (i.e., family wealth and having to participate in earning a livelihood) was cited by 92.1 per cent of respondents as a barrier with high/very high prevalence, followed at 75.4 per cent by personal physical characteristics of children (e.g., gender, age, disability);

(b) Also illustrated in annex 1 are barriers that were cited as being least responsible for keeping children away from school. These include personal history (e.g., history of traumatization, civil war experience) and school culture and/or rules of behaviour. The fact that personal history was cited as a barrier of lower prevalence signals that children are indeed resilient, possibly because of programming aimed at their well-being and rehabilitation. Also, for school culture to be cited as the least-prevalent barrier seems to suggest that children, presumably with their parents' involvement, are not being deterred from participating in school by matters such as rules of behaviour;

(c) OOSCI studies have included more-detailed analyses than previous studies, providing countries with baselines to use for monitoring progress towards more inclusive basic education;

(d) The five dimensions of exclusion as articulated by OOSCI were not adequate to describe all profiles of out-of-school children. The evaluation also found that the upper-secondary school population should be included in the OOSCI methodological framework to make it more responsive to different country contexts;

(e) Many children are out of school for reasons that cut across the five dimensions of exclusion as articulated in the OOSCI methodological framework. Also, barriers are multifaceted; some barriers can be addressed by making improvements to the education system, while others fall under the authority of other sectors, such as health and social protection;

(f) OOSCI has contributed positively to increasing the visibility of the subject of out-of-school children in education development discourse, policy dialogue and agenda-setting.

Conclusion 2

20. OOSCI studies have laid an important foundation in the development of comprehensive profiles of out-of-school children in each country and the identification of barriers. However, the analysis of barriers needs to be contextualized and updated periodically to remain responsive to the needs of different groups of out-of-school children.

21. The second set of findings on evidence generation confirms the hypothesis promulgated by OOSCI, namely that:

(a) If countries invest in generating complete profiles of out-of-school children, and identify and address the barriers that keep them from school and mitigate them, then a reduction in the number of children who are out of school would be realized, but only in countries with (i) a low human development index; and/or (ii) countries that are stable;

(b) According to a qualitative comparative analysis, in countries that were not successful in generating complete profiles of out-of-school children or in identifying and addressing barriers that keep children from school, reductions in the number of out-of-school children were still realized in countries that were relatively prosperous (using a high human development index ranking as a proxy for prosperity) and were judged as stable (i.e., fragile States index score of 60 or less).

22. While there may be additional factors that would bring even greater success in reducing the number of out-of- chool children, the qualitative comparative analysis confirmed that identifying profiles and generating recommendations that clearly address barriers are necessary first steps to a reduction in the number of out-of-school children.

Conclusion 3

23. Evidence and policy guidance from OOSCI studies have become a useful resource for planning processes in education departments and for education sector partners. To the extent that the initiative has gained acceptance in partner countries, OOSCI is well positioned to push important messages, such as the value of stability in terms of a lack of conflict and a productive economic environment, and to provide support to turn those messages into action tailored for different programming contexts.

24. The third set of findings, on utility, indicates a need for course correction:

(a) In most cases, OOSCI studies were successful in generating data to estimate the number of out-of-school children. However, these figures were often contested, resulting in some countries being reluctant to release their studies for public consumption;

(b) The degree to which baselines were being monitored and/or compared with follow-up data differed greatly among countries, depending on human resource

capacities and the availability of funding for maintaining complex data collection systems;

(c) While OOSCI studies were successful in generating recommendations to address key issues affecting out-of-school children, the recommended actions were sometimes tenuous in terms of addressing the most prevalent barriers and bottlenecks, and at times not feasible and/or actionable. As a result, solutions for eliminating the barriers that keep children away from school were not prioritized on the agendas of a significant number of OOSCI partner countries.

Conclusion 4

25. While the contribution of UNICEF and OOSCI partners has led to discernible progress and changes in policies and planning, a gap between policy and planning, on one hand, and implementation, on the other, remains, mainly because of the inadequate prioritization of issues facing out-of-school children. The evaluation concluded that a new advocacy effort around out-of-school children is required. Also required is the prioritization of solutions and/or interventions for the most disadvantaged subgroups of out-of-school children and a resourcing model for issues facing all such children.

C. Partnerships to advance programming for out-of-school children

26. The findings on OOSCI partnerships relate first to the "core partners" (UNICEF, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Partnership for Education), and include the following:

(a) OOSCI partnership arrangements and the division of tasks among the core partners were considered to be cohesive and productive and to have increased the efficiency of a majority of implementers, while the contribution of all OOSCI partners was credited with having expanded geographical coverage of activities and interventions for out-of-school children. This outcome was highly valued by participating Governments;

(b) OOSCI is credited with having created a higher demand for technical and policy advice around issues affecting out-of-school children, and to have increased opportunities for face-to-face interaction with decision makers.

27. The slate of partners involved in the work around out-of-school children indicated that the government sector dominates the discourse in this area. It is understandable that Government, as a duty-bearer, should be accountable for enacting policy and planning for and delivering services, and should be fully represented in the discussion around out-of-school children. However, the evaluation also found that:

(a) OOSCI non-governmental partners were not diverse enough. National civil society organizations were underrepresented in the work around out-of-school children in comparison with international non-governmental organizations. Also, the roles and results expected from this category of partners were not clearly defined;

(b) OOSCI was highly valued by smaller non-governmental organization partners whose views are rarely represented in policy debates, and who regarded the opportunity to work alongside OOSCI as reclaiming their "voice".

28. While the initiative's partnership approach was still evolving, the low participation of national civil society organizations suggested that some key constituencies might be missing from this important dialogue. The absence from the policy table of some constituencies could mean that policies enacted as a result of OOSCI may not only perpetuate exclusion, but could institutionalize it.

Conclusion 5

29. In an operating environment subject to frequent changes in government staffing, shifting donor resources and the continuous movement of people, UNICEF was regarded by all actors as a constant factor and a reliable "anchor partner"; its convening power helped to move partnership objectives forward.

D. Strengthening education systems and capacities

30. One of the programme objectives of OOSCI was to address the capacity gap for both individuals and education systems. For instance, OOSCI was credited with having contributed to substantial improvement in data collection systems in a handful of countries, and in one country was credited with spurring enhancements to the national education management information system (EMIS) that enabled it to track out-of-school children. For the remaining partner countries, the findings of the evaluation indicate the following:

(a) Half of the countries sampled for the document review phase of the evaluation demonstrated only modest success in the improvement of data systems and processes, while commendable success was registered in only a small number of countries;

(b) The availability of robust and reliable data was highly inconsistent, mostly because of limitations in financial and human resource capacities for data collection, analysis, interpretation and related processes;

(c) Except for a few isolated cases, coordination and/or collaboration between different sectors and line ministries regarding out-of-school children was not systematic;

(d) The rigid application of the five dimensions of exclusion approach and the weak alignment and complementarity of inputs from different sectors of Government have resulted in groups of out-of-school children affected by religious, ethnic and other forms of discrimination being shut out of OOSCI and other targeted support from UNICEF.

31. While there has been a reduction in the number of children that are out of school since the inception of OOSCI, it is not possible to attribute this change to OOSCI and/or UNICEF activities by means of a quantifiable contribution. However, a robust contribution analysis to explain the factors that account for the reduction in the number of out-of-school children is methodologically possible, and is required to sustain the evaluability of OOSCI.

32. While OOSCI activities have contributed positively in some instances, the initiative has fallen short on sustainability. Governments remain highly constrained in implementation capacities for just about every aspect of the education sector. Also, there is a need for greater efficiencies between different sectors with a mandate for serving vulnerable children, with out-of-school children being only a subset of this category. The capacity to identify and serve all children, including developing profiles of all children who are excluded from school, have been strengthened, but not in a sustainable way.

33. With OOSCI support, Governments should be assisted to reimagine and reengineer EMIS and similar processes such that they can have a radar on all children, all the time, including those who periodically enter and exit formal education systems, either because they are too poor to stay in school or are compelled to exit one school system and enter another due to conflict or other destabilizing factors.

Conclusion 6

34. Technical capacities to identify and serve all children, including all those excluded from school, were strengthened. However, improvements were confined to

individual capacities and did not permeate the system. As such, the gains from OOSCI will not be sustainable in the long run unless the next generation of OOSCI studies concentrates greater effort on supporting Governments to achieve systemic changes.

E. Evaluative assessment

35. In the few years that the initiative has been operational, OOSCI has proven its relevance, effectiveness and utility, particularly in stable contexts in which it has been able to take root. However, while the initiative has some internal coherence, additional conceptualization and inputs are required to improve its external coherence and sustainability, and to extend its reach, relevance and utility within more challenging and complex programming contexts, including in fragile States and countries with humanitarian programming.

36. Generally, however, evidence from OOSCI studies has enhanced national capacities for mapping the profiles of out-of-school children, as well as for analysing the complex and multisectoral barriers that impede access or constrain the completion of basic education. However, as noted above, adequate attention has not been given to barriers that involve religious, ethnic, political or ideological discrimination in society.

37. Overall, the evaluation findings show that OOSCI has been instrumental in situating issues of out-of-school children at the centre of the development agenda at the national and international levels. Some level of advocacy and commitment to these issues is shown around the processes of setting priorities and formulating sector plans. However, this has not been matched by the allocation of adequate resources on a sustainable basis, and it is not always clear if all partners fully embrace the "rights-based" model of education underpinning OOSCI. Table 1 examines the value of OOSCI more systematically under the OECD/DAC criteria.

Table 1

Evaluative assessment of the Out-of-School Children Initiative using criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criterion	DAC definition	Assessment
1. Relevance	Assesses whether the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) is in line with local needs and priorities and consistent with intended effects	OOSCI was found to be relevant to national and international debates on equity in development. By highlighting the plight of out-of-school children, even as countries celebrate gains in enrolment rates and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals/Sustainable Development Goals, it has raised issues of equity and fairness as well as the rights of children in the quest to make full use of the human resource potential of countries. In addition, through policy dialogue and strategic support, OOSCI has enhanced its relevance in helping to shape national priorities and to formulate robust sector plans that embrace education as a right for all children.
2. Effectiveness	Measures the extent to which OOSCI has achieved its purpose or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of outputs	In most countries, OOSCI has been effective in [illegible] national stakeholders who were ready to support the shift from targeted community interventions to an effective systemic approach with regard to out-of-school children. Consequently, an effective and inclusive process of policymaking and priority-setting around out-of-school issues has been triggered at the macro level. However, OOSCI has been less effective in supporting countries to translate recommended policies and strategies into concrete practice.
3. Efficiency	Measures the ratio of outputs achieved to the total inputs contributed (cost efficiency timeliness) in comparison to other alternatives	By being embedded in priority-setting processes, developing sector plans and mobilizing resources, OOSCI partner agencies have contributed efficiently to measures that address key challenges posed by the problem of out-of-school children in target countries. Efficiency could be improved by keeping all OOSCI partners engaged by assigning more roles and tasks, and through deeper collaboration between OOSCI partners. This would enable partners to better "deliver as one" in providing their support for measures that help to translate policies, plans and priorities into concrete achievements on issues pertaining to out-of-school children. In this regard, marshalling the research capacities of a partner such as Understanding Children's Work and allocating specific tasks to the group should increase the efficiencies of OOSCI.
4. Utility	Assesses the ability of a service to satisfy the needs or wants of the target group(s)	The utility of OOSCI is linked to availability of resources on a sustainable basis. Without such sustainable resources, the problem of out-of-school children will persist or worsen, no matter how many studies and strategic plans the initiative generates for any given country.
5. Coherence	Assesses consistency in approach and whether policies and guidance take into account standards and human rights considerations	Barriers to universal education are complicated and intertwined. Hence, the ability to deliver a comprehensive national, regional and global response depends upon the sound interrogation of concepts and claims about what OOSCI can deliver. In that regard, OOSCI was internally coherent enough to be functional it its formative phase. As end users begin to expect more of OOSCI, additional work will be required to make it conceptually sound and to coordinate effectively across sectors and among stakeholders.

Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criterion	*DAC definition*	*Assessment*
		The external coherence of OOSCI has also been low because of weak cross-sectoral coordination and the failure to attract the necessary non-traditional partners. There is still a need to improve coordination, strengthen leadership on programming and seek out and engage with less prominent significant partners.
6. Sustainability	Assesses if the achievement of the goals can be maintained by the respective systems' resources and services, and if the benefits of an intervention can continue after the end of donor funding	Sustainability depends not only on the availability of resources at the country level, but also on the political will and commitment of Governments and partners to a rights-based model of education. Resources facilitate the implemeniation of feasible solutions and commitment drives efforts towards the progressive realization of basic education for all. Resources and commitments are not yet at levels that would enable sustainability in addressing the challenges posed by out-of-school children. This is particularly the case for domestic resources, implying a need for long-term external support.

IV. Recommendations and management response

38. The recommendations draw from the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. They are aimed at proposing and justifying, from a long menu of possible solutions, key actions that will shape the thinking of OOSCI and partners on how to configure and/or package their support to partner countries in order to achieve the shared goal of accelerating a reduction in the number of out-of-school children.

39. . The recommendations are addressed to all OOSCI partners, but their execution targets UNICEF as the lead partner. Selected members from the reference group were invited to validate the recommendations, first to determine whether they were based on the findings of the evaluation and were well-targeted and actionable and, second, to determine whether the required follow-up actions were practical and/or feasible. UNICEF management considered and accepted all the recommendations; their response to each recommendation is summarized below.

Recommendation 1: Revise/update the theory of change for the Out-of-School Children Initiative

40. The theory of change for OOSCI should be revised to reflect the key elements of inclusion to ensure that the needs of all out-of-school children are met at all levels of the basic education cycle, while ensuring that the initiative focuses on identifying strategies and policies that empower Governments to eliminate the lack of participation at the pre-primary level, such as sustainable, pro-poor financing for the subsector.

Recommendation 2: Expand technical capabilities for effective implementation and comprehensive monitoring

41. OOSCI should expand its focus to harness the expertise and capabilities of OOSCI technical partners to seek effective and efficient strategies and solutions that support the implementation and comprehensive monitoring of policies in key contexts in which programming for different profiles of out-of-school children occurs and to attract resources to ascertain the sustainability of implementation.

Recommendation 3: Reorient the Out-of-School Children Initiative to cover the entire basic education cycle and all profiles of out-of-school learners

42. The methodological framework for OOSCI should be reoriented towards the entire basic education cycle (i.e., pre-primary through upper-secondary) and target key vulnerable groups that cut across all profiles of out-of-school children. It should generate explicit strategies that address the learning needs of these groups, including but not limited to embracing appropriate forms of learning for them and responsive modalities for delivering those learning opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Expand the partner base for the Out-of-School Children Initiative to make it inclusive, while maintaining a focus on results

43. While maintaining the usual focus on supporting Governments to discharge their mandate to extend learning opportunities to all children, OOSCI should facilitate processes for assembling the right type of partners, including but not limited to government officials, that have a clear potential to bring new ideas and/or offer new entry points for programming for out-of-school children.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen programmatic elements to yield evaluable information on the contribution of the Out-of-School Children Initiative to the reduction in the number of out-of-school children

44. OOSCI should strengthen all its programmatic elements to set up the initiative to yield evaluable information on the stated goal of achieving a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of out-of-school children. This includes ascertaining the internal and external coherence of the initiative and the feasibility of achieving the intended results and ensuring that adequate monitoring and evaluation inputs and systems are put in place to enable systematic assessments of the OOSCI contribution.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the following documents presented to the Executive Board at the first regular session of 2019:

(a) Formative evaluation of the Out-Of-School Children Initiative, its executive summary (E/ICEF/2019/3) and its management response (E/ICEF/2019/4);

(b) Independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, its executive summary (E/ICEF/2019/5) and its management response (E/ICEF/2019/6).

Annex I

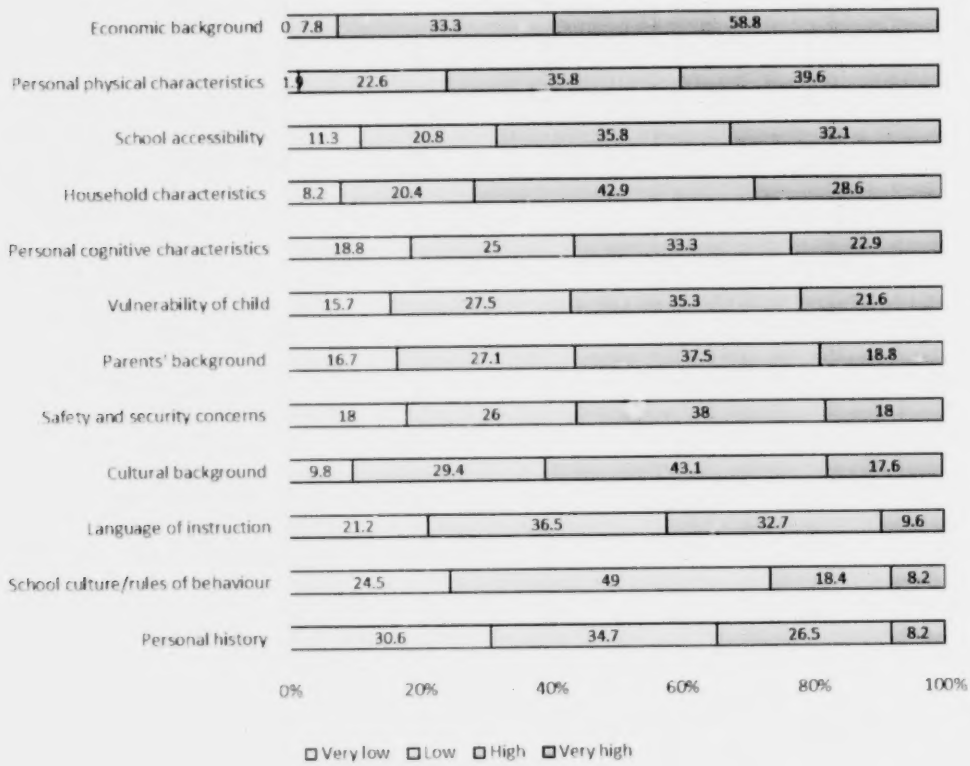
Evaluation questions, by evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria	*Evaluation questions*
Relevance and coherence	1.1 To what extent is universal access to basic education specified as a goal, outcome or result for OOSCI partner countries? (Descriptive)
	1.2 Have OOSCI partner countries articulated clear and coherent strategies, inputs and outputs towards the outcome universal access to basic education? (Descriptive)
	1.3 What are the different ways in which countries have engaged in OOSCI, and how much progress has been made towards achieving OOSCI objectives (Descriptive)
	1.4 Does support from partners constitute a clear added-value to government efforts in providing access to basic education? (Normative)
	1.5 How has each of the OOSCI core partners (national Governments, UNICEF, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics, Global Partnership for Education, Understanding Children's Work) contributed to the initiative, and what efficiencies have been realized as a result of that division of responsibilities? (Descriptive and normative)
	1.6 Is there alignment and complementarity between government efforts, UNICEF support and support of key partners in providing access to basic education? (Normative)
Effectiveness and utility	2.1 How effective were OOSCI studies in generating accurate profiles of children that are out of school and associated barriers (family, societal systemic/structural, etc.)? (Normative)
	2.2 What are the different types of effects that were realized by OOSCI studies and the political, financial and technical conditions that made those effects possible in some contexts and not others? (Descriptive)
	2.3 What is the significance of those effects in terms of coverage and/or reach, in both development and humanitarian contexts? (Normative)
	2.4 To what extent did national government counterparts and partners use the data and evidence generated by OOSCI studies to develop new policies? What is the implementation status of those policies? (Descriptive)
	2.5 Did OOSCI studies influence the inclusion of programmes/interventions for children that are out of school in education sector plans? Are those programmes accompanied by clear result frameworks and reasonable pathways to achieving the intended results? (Descriptive and normative)
	2.6 Did OOSCI studies generate recommendations that address the key barriers/issues? Were there deliberate processes to ensure country ownership of the recommendations, and were the recommendations actionable? (Descriptive and normative)
	2.7 Did OOSCI studies and activities make any identifiable contribution to the reduction in the number of out-of-school children in partner countries? (Normative)

Sustainability	3.1 Did OOSCI result in improvements in administrative data collection systems (e.g., to use techniques such as geographic information systems mapping) to collect subnational data and student level data)? (Descriptive) 3.2 Did OOSCI result in greater integration and/or collaboration between the different sectors and line ministries to address issues of out-of-school children? (Descriptive) 3.3 To what extent has OOSCI strengthened capacities of national counterparts and partners to generate reports interpret and use the data for programming and decision-making? (Normative) 3.4 To what extent has OOSCI strengthened capacities of UNICEF education staff to influence policy dialogue and to carry out effective advocacy with partners and other stakeholders, including senior government officials? (Normative) 3.5 To what extent has advocacy around OOSCI work resulted in international commitments and actions to address the problem of out-of-school children?

Annex II

Prevalence of barriers that keep children from participating in schooling (percentage)



Annex III

Formative evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative

Due to space limitations, the text of the independent report entitled "Formative evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative" is not contained within the present annex. The report (168 pages) and a summary are available from the UNICEF Evaluation Office website: www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_102939.html.